

Vermont State Hospital Policy		A25
Visitors Policy		
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Policy Statement:

It is the policy of VSH to encourage patient visits where clinically appropriate. VSH recognizes that significant therapeutic benefit may be derived from supporting a patient's existing relationships with family and friends. VSH shall seek to realize this benefit in a manner consistent with maintaining safety and patient privacy.

Definitions: This policy groups visitors to the Vermont State Hospital into three distinct categories:

“Patient Visitors” means visitors who are patient representatives, family members, or others who have come to VSH to see a specific patient with whom they have a pre-existing relationship. The term “patient visitors” also includes those outpatient clinicians, case managers, liaisons, etc. whom may or may not have a pre-existing relationship with the patient but whom are involved in the patient's aftercare planning. The term “patient representative” includes guardians, advance directive agents, and patient attorneys.

“Hospital Visitors” means visitors to the Vermont State Hospital who have not come to meet with a specific, identified patient. This group includes but is not limited to public officials, law enforcement officers, healthcare overseers, organizational consultants, forensic consultants, recovery educators, volunteers, business associates, and advocacy organization representatives other than Vermont Protection and Advocacy (see section V, below). See also: *VSH Media Policy* for visits by members of the media and *VSH Law Enforcement Contact with Patients Policy* for visits from members of law enforcement.

“Representatives from Vermont Protection and Advocacy” means employees or agents of Vermont Protection and Advocacy, Inc.

Procedures:

I. Visiting Hours

Visiting hours on all units are daily from 3PM - 4PM and 6PM - 8PM. On Saturday, Sunday, and Holidays, visiting hours are from 10AM - 11AM, 1PM – 4PM and 6PM – 8PM. Exceptions to the visiting hours may be made by the charge nurse of each unit.

Visiting hours are designed to avoid conflict with programming. However, VSH recognizes that family and other support system members are critical to the health and recovery of VSH patients. Therefore, every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate patient visitors. VSH encourages visitors that will be visiting outside of regular visiting hours to call in advance to schedule a visit whenever possible.

II. Notice to Visitors

VSH shall ensure that the following notice is posted at the entrances to the Hospital and at the entrances to all patient units:

TO ALL VSH VISITORS:

Information concerning patients receiving treatment at Vermont State Hospital is extremely sensitive. Therefore, we request that you respect the privacy of the patients at the hospital and any information you may receive during your visit.

III. Patient Visitors -- Check-In and Check-Out

- A.** Patient visitors shall check in at the designated check-in area.
- B.** On every visit, patient visitors shall be required to present a valid, signed photo I.D. card before they will be granted access to the unit. Exceptions can be made by the charge nurse. Check-in staff will record the visitor's name and the date and time of the visit in the Visitor Log. To ensure patient privacy, visitors shall not be permitted to fill out the Visitor Log.
- C.** No more than four visitors per patient at the same time are allowed. Exceptions to the visitor number may be made by the charge nurse.
- D.** Visits by children under the age of 18 must be pre-approved by the patient's treatment team. Any approved visitor under the age of 18 must be accompanied and supervised at all times by a parent or guardian. VSH staff will not be responsible for supervising visiting children.
- E.** Visits will be conducted in designated areas. Generally, interview rooms or the general dining area are available for patient visits.
- F.** Patient visitors will be asked to identify potential contraband materials that may be on their persons or contained in items which they have brought for patients. The charge nurse or nurse supervisor must approve any items which might be contraband that a visitor proposes to give to a patient. Patient visitors will be asked to leave purses, bags, cameras, keys, jewelry, and metal objects in the screening area. VSH reserves the right to prohibit visitors from bringing any item into the unit that, in the discretion of check-in staff, poses a potential threat to the safety and security of patients (please refer to the *VSH Restricted Items and Search Policy* for a non-exhaustive list of restricted items). On B1, visitors will be scanned by a metal detector prior to entering the unit.

- G. Check-in staff may verify that a visitor's pockets are empty and inspect any bag that is brought onto the unit to confirm the absence of contraband or items.
- H. Patients are free to receive visits from anyone unless the attending physician or a member of the patient's treatment team has documented in the medical record that a visit from a particular individual or visits in general present a likelihood of harm to the patient or others. The *VSH Levels of Autonomy and Supervision Policy* provides further potential limitations on patient visitation. Patients have the right to refuse patient visitors.
- I. Individuals who appear to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances, or who are using loud, abusive, or vulgar language may be denied permission to enter the unit. Individuals who engage in inappropriate behavior or who use loud, abusive, or vulgar language during a patient visit may be asked to leave at any time. Where an individual has been denied permission to enter the unit or where a visit has been terminated based on that individual's conduct, check-in staff shall notify the charge nurse or nurse supervisor and note the reason the individual was turned away or asked to leave in the Visitor Log.

IV. Hospital Visitors -- Check-In and Check-Out

- A. Visitors who are not visiting an identified patient ("Hospital Visitors") must check in at the admissions office.
- B. Hospital visitors must identify themselves and inform admissions staff of the purpose of their visit. Admissions staff shall record this information along with the date and time of the visit in the Visitor Log. All hospital visitors must provide a valid, signed photo I.D. before they will be permitted to enter the hospital. Exceptions may be made by the Hospital Supervisor or designee.
- C. Hospital visitors that will be visiting patient care areas will be asked to bring only those items that are necessary for the professional services that they provide and to avoid bringing any unnecessary, potential contraband items onto the units.
- D. The admissions office shall issue every hospital visitor a visitor's pass which the visitor shall display on his or her person while in VSH.
- E. Prior to leaving VSH, Hospital Visitors must check out at the admissions office and return their visitor's pass. Admissions staff shall record the visitors' time of departure in the Visitor Log.

V. Vermont Protection and Advocacy (VT P&A)

Representatives of Vermont Protection and Advocacy shall have access to patients in accordance with 42 CFR Part 51. VT P&A is funded to provide legal representation and advocacy for persons

with significant mental illness or emotional impairment as determined by a mental health professional.

- A. FACILITIES- The law states that a P&A system shall have reasonable unaccompanied access to public and private facilities providing care and treatment for individuals with mental illness. The P&A staff should be able to access all areas of the hospital, which are used by patients or are accessible to patients. When in a hospital P&A staff may inspect, view, and photograph those areas used or accessible to patients, and monitor hospital compliance with respect to the rights and safety of patients. The P&A staff are required to conduct their activities to minimize interference with hospital programs and to respect patient's privacy interests. The P&A staff may have access to a hospital on request when: an incident is reported or a complaint is made to the P&A; the P&A determines there is probable cause to believe an incident has or may occur; or the P&A determines there is or may be imminent danger or serious abuse or neglect of an individual. In addition, P&A staff may have access for educational, outreach and monitoring purposes. If access is denied or delayed for any reason, the P&A must be provided with a written statement of the reason at the time of the denial. Access to patients may only be denied when there is a documented medical reason to deny access. In such a case an alternative time for contacting the patient must be identified.
- B. PATIENTS AND FACILITY STAFF – The P&A is allowed reasonable unaccompanied access to patients during times that will include, at a minimum, normal working hours and visiting hours. Unaccompanied access to patients includes the ability to regularly meet and communicate privately with patients via telephone, mail, or in person. This access includes minors and patients with guardians. However, a P&A may not take formal action on behalf of a minor unless a parent or guardian has given consent. Consent from a parent or guardian is not necessary if the P&A determines that there is, or may be, imminent danger of serious abuse or neglect. This right of access includes access to patients at all times necessary when conducting an investigation into abuse or neglect as well as an opportunity to interview hospital staff.

Guidance:

VSH may deny access to a patient's medical record if the chart is in use at the time. VSH shall offer individuals entitled to view the patient's medical records with reasonable alternative times when the patient's medical records may be reviewed.